



Of babble he abhorred.

VII

He revered her name and line, 25  
Nor other merit had  
Save soldierwise to wait her sign,  
And do the deed she bade.

VIII

He saw her hand jump at her side  
Ere royally she smiled 30  
On Louis and his fair young bride  
Where courtly ranks defiled.

IX

That was a moment when a shock  
Through the procession ran,  
And thrilled the plumes, and stayed the clock, 35  
Yet smiled Archduchess Anne.

X

No touch gave she to hound in leash,  
No wink to sword in sheath:  
She seemed a woman scarce of flesh;  
Above it, or beneath. 40

XI

Old Kraken spied with kennelled snarl,  
His Lady deemed disgraced.  
He footed as on burning marl,  
When out of Hall he paced.

XII

'Twas seen he hammered striding legs, 45  
And stopped, and strode again.  
Now Vengeance has a brood of eggs,  
But Patience must be hen.

XIII

Too slow are they for wrath to hatch,  
Too hot for time to rear. 50  
Old Kraken kept unwinking watch;

He marked his day appear.

XIV

He neighed a laugh, though moods were rough  
With standards in revolt:  
His nostrils took the news for snuff, 55  
His smacking lips for salt.

XV

Count Louis' wavy cock's plumes led  
His troops of black-haired manes,  
A rebel; and old Kraken sped  
To front him on the plains. 60

XVI

Then camp opposed to camp did they  
Fret earth with panther claws  
For signal of a bloody day,  
Each reading from the Laws.

XVII

'Forefend it, heaven!' Count Louis cried, 65  
'And let the righteous plead:  
My country is a willing bride,  
Was never slave decreed.

XVIII

'Not we for thirst of blood appeal  
To sword and slaughter curst; 70  
We have God's blessing on our steel,  
Do we our pleading first.'

XIX

Count Louis, soul of chivalry,  
Put trust in plighted word;  
By starlight on the broad brown lea, 75  
To bar the strife he spurred.

XX

Across his breast a crimson spot,  
That in a quiver glowed,  
The ruddy crested camp-fires shot,

As he to darkness rode. 80

XXI

He rode while omens called, beware  
Old Kraken's pledge of faith!  
A smile and waving hand in air,  
And outward flew the wraith.

XXII

Before pale morn had mixed with gold, 85  
His army roared, and chilled,  
As men who have a woe foretold,  
And see it red fulfilled.

XXIII

Away and to his young wife speed,  
And say that Honour's dead! 90  
Another word she will not need  
To bow a widow's head.

XXIV

Old Kraken roped his white moustache  
Right, left, for savage glee:  
— To swing him in his soldier's sash 95  
Were kind for such as he!

XXV

Old Kraken's look hard Winter wears  
When sweeps the wild snow-blast:  
He had the hug of Arctic bears  
For captives he held fast. 100

II

I

Archduchess Anne sat carved in frost,  
Shut off from priest and spouse.  
Her lips were locked, her arms were crossed,  
Her eyes were in her brows.

II

One hand enclosed a paper scroll, 105  
Held as a strangled asp.  
So may we see the woman's soul  
In her dire tempter's grasp.

III

Along that scroll Count Louis' doom 110  
Throbb'd till the letters flamed.  
She saw him in his scornful bloom,  
She saw him chained and shamed.

IV

Around that scroll Count Louis' fate  
Was acted to her stare,  
And hate in love and love in hate 115  
Fought fell to smite or spare.

V

Between the day that struck her old,  
And this black star of days,  
Her heart swung like a storm-bell tolled  
Above a town ablaze. 120

VI

His beauty pressed to intercede,  
His beauty served him ill.  
— Not Vengeance, 'tis his rebel's deed,  
'Tis Justice, not our will!

VII

Yet who had sprung to life's full force 125  
A breast that loveless dried?  
But who had sapped it at the source,  
With scarlet to her pride!

VIII

He brought her waning heart as 'twere  
New message from the skies. 130  
And he betrayed, and left on her  
The burden of their sighs.

IX

In floods her tender memories poured;  
They foamed with waves of spite:  
She crushed them, high her heart outsoared, 135  
To keep her mind alight.

X

— The crawling creature, called in scorn  
A woman! — with this pen  
We sign a paper that may warn  
His crowing fellowmen. 140

XI

— We read them lesson of a power  
They slight who do us wrong.  
That bitter hour this bitter hour  
Provokes; by turns the strong!

XII

— That we were woman once is known: 145  
That we are Justice now,  
Above our sex, above the throne,  
Men quaking shall avow.

XIII

Archduchess Anne ascending flew,  
Her heart outsoared, but felt 150  
The demon of her sex pursue,  
Incensing or to melt.

XIV

Those counterfloods below at leap  
Still in her breast blew storm,  
And farther up the heavenly steep 155  
Wrestled in angels' form.

XV

To disentangle one clear wish  
Not of her sex, she sought;  
And womanish to womanish  
Discerned in lighted thought. 160

XVI

With Louis' chance it went not well  
When at herself she raged;  
A woman, of whom men might tell  
She doted, crazed and aged.

XVII

Or else enamoured of a sweet  
Withdrawn, a vengeful crone!  
And say, what figure at her feet  
Is this that utters moan? 165

XVIII

The Countess Louis from her head  
Drew veil: 'Great Lady, hear!  
My husband deems you Justice dread,  
I know you Mercy dear. 170

XIX

'His error upon him may fall;  
He will not breathe a nay.  
I am his helpless mate in all,  
Except for grace to pray. 175

XX

'Perchance on me his choice inclined,  
To give his House an heir:  
I had not marriage with his mind,  
His counsel could not share. 180

XXI

'I brought no portion for his weal  
But this one instinct true,  
Which bids me in my weakness kneel,  
Archduchess Anne, to you.'

XXII

The frowning Lady uttered, 'Forth!'  
Her look forbade delay:  
'It is not mine to weigh your worth;  
Your husband's others weigh. 185

XXIII

‘Hence with the woman in your speech,  
For nothing it avails  
In woman’s fashion to beseech  
Where Justice holds the scales.’ 190

XXIV

Then bent and went the lady wan,  
Whose girlishness made grey  
The thoughts that through Archduchess Anne 195  
Shattered like stormy spray.

XXV

Long sat she there, as flame that strives  
To hold on beating wind:  
— His wife must be the fool of wives,  
Or cunningly designed! 200

XXVI

She sat until the tempest-pitch  
In her torn bosom fell;  
— His wife must be a subtle witch  
Or else God loves her well!

III

I

Old Kraken read a missive penned 205  
By his great Lady’s hand.  
Her condescension called him friend,  
To raise the crest she fanned.

II

Swiftly to where he lay encamped  
It flew, yet breathed aloof 210  
From woman’s feeling, and he stamped  
A heel more like a hoof.

III

She wrote of Mercy: ‘She was loth  
Too hard to goad a foe.’  
He stamped, as when men drive an oath 215



Devils transcribe below.

IV

She wrote: 'We have him half by theft.'  
His wrinkles glistened keen:  
And see the Winter storm-cloud cleft  
To lurid skies between! 220

V

When read old Kraken: 'Christ our Guide,'  
His eyes were spikes of spar:  
And see the white snow-storm divide  
About an icy star!

VI

'She trusted him to understand,' 225  
She wrote, and further prayed  
That policy might rule the land.  
Old Kraken's laughter neighed.

VII

Her words he took; her nods and winks  
Treated as woman's fog. 230  
The man-dog for his mistress thinks,  
Not less her faithful dog.

VIII

She hugged a cloak old Kraken ripped;  
Disguise to him he loathed.  
— Your mercy, madam, shows you stripped, 235  
While mine will keep you clothed.

IX

A rough ill-soldered scar in haste  
He rubbed on his cheek-bone.  
— Our policy the man shall taste;  
Our mercy shall be shown. 240

X

'Count Louis, honour to your race  
Decrees the Council-hall:  
You 'scape the rope by special grace,

And like a soldier fall.'

XI

— I am a man of many sins, 245  
Who for one virtue die,  
Count Louis said. — They play at shins,  
Who kick, was the reply.

XII

Uprose the day of crimson sight,  
The day without a God. 250  
At morn the hero said Good-night:  
See there that stain on sod!

XIII

At morn the Countess Louis heard  
Young light sing in the lark.  
Ere eve it was that other bird, 255  
Which brings the starless dark.

XIV

To heaven she vowed herself, and yearned  
Beside her lord to lie.  
Archduchess Anne on Kraken turned,  
All white as a dead eye. 260

XV

If I could kill thee! shrieked her look:  
If lightning sprang from Will!  
An oaken head old Kraken shook,  
And she might thank or kill.

XVI

The pride that fenced her heart in mail 265  
By mortal pain was torn.  
Forth from her bosom leaped a wail,  
As of a babe new-born.

XVII

She clad herself in courtly use,  
And one who heard them prate 270  
Had said they differed upon views

Where statecraft raised debate.

XVIII

The wretch detested must she trust,  
The servant master own:  
Confide to godless cause so just, 275  
And for God's blessing moan.

XIX

Austerely she her heart kept down,  
Her woman's tongue was mute  
When voice of People, voice of Crown,  
In cannon held dispute. 280

XX

The Crown on seas of blood, like swine,  
Swam forefoot at the throat:  
It drank of its dear veins for wine,  
Enough if it might float!

XXI

It sank with piteous yelp, resurged 285  
Electrical with fear.  
O had she on old Kraken urged  
Her word of mercy clear!

XXII

O had they with Count Louis been  
Accordant in his plea! 290  
Cursed are the women vowed to screen  
A heart that all can see!

XXIII

The godless drove unto a goal  
Was worse than vile defeat.  
Did vengeance prick Count Louis' soul 295  
They dressed him luscious meat.

XXIV

Worms will the faithless find their lies  
In the close treasure-chest.  
Without a God no day can rise,

Though it should slay our best. 300

XXV

The Crown it furled a draggled flag,  
It sheathed a broken blade.  
Behold its triumph in the hag  
That lives with looks decayed!

XXVI

And lo, the man of oaken head, 305  
Of soldier's honour bare,  
He fled his land, but most he fled  
His Lady's frigid stare.

XXVII

Judged by the issue we discern  
God's blessing, and the bane. 310  
Count Louis' dust would fill an urn,  
His deeds are waving grain.

XXVIII

And she that helped to slay, yet bade  
To spare the fated man,  
Great were her errors, but she had 315  
Great heart, Archduchess Anne.

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